

Analysts' Warnings of Iraq Chaos Detailed

Senate Panel Releases Assessments From 2003

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Months before the invasion of Iraq, U.S. intelligence agencies predicted that it would be likely to spark violent sectarian divides and provide al-Qaeda with new opportunities in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to a report released yesterday by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Analysts warned that war in Iraq also could provoke Iran to assert its regional influence and "probably would result in a surge of political Islam and increased funding for terrorist groups" in the Muslim world.

The intelligence assessments, made in January 2003 and widely circulated within the Bush administration before the war, said that establishing democracy in Iraq would be "a long, difficult and probably turbulent challenge." The assessments noted that Iraqi political culture was "largely bereft of the social underpinnings" to support democratic development.

More than four years after the March 2003 invasion, with Iraq still mired in violence and 150,000 U.S. troops there under continued attack from al-Qaeda and Iraqi insurgents, the intelligence warnings seem prophetic. Other predictions, however, were less than accurate. Intelligence analysts assessed that any postwar increase in terrorism would slowly subside in three to five years, and that Iraq's vast oil reserves would quickly facilitate economic reconstruction.

The report is the latest release in the Senate committee's ongoing study of prewar intelligence. A July 2004 report identified intelligence-gathering and analysis failures related to weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Still pending is a study of how the administration used intelligence on Iraq in the run-up to the war.

The report was released the same day President Bush signed a \$120 billion war funding bill from Congress that includes benchmarks for the Iraqi government.

In a statement attached to yesterday's 229-page report, the Senate intelligence committee's chairman, John D. Rockefeller IV (W.Va.), and three other Democratic panel members said: "The most chilling and prescient warning from the intelligence community prior to the war was that the American invasion would bring about instability in Iraq that would be exploited by Iran and al Qaeda terrorists."

In addition to portraying a terrorist nexus between Iraq and al-Qaeda that did not exist, the Democrats said, the Bush administration "also kept from the American people . . . the sobering intelligence assessments it received at the time" -- that an Iraq war could allow al-Qaeda "to establish the presence in Iraq and opportunity to strike at Americans it did not have prior to the invasion."

Sen. Christopher S. Bond (Mo.), vice chairman of the panel, and three other Republican members said the assessments were "not a crystal ball" and that the warnings emphasized in the committee report "lacked detail or specificity that would have guided military planners." Overall, the Republicans said the report "exaggerates the significance of the prewar assessments" and that the inquiry itself "has become too embroiled in politics and partisanship."

Most of the information in the report was drawn from two lengthy assessments issued by the National Intelligence Council in January 2003, titled "Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq" and "Regional Consequences of Regime Change in Iraq," both of which the Senate report reprints with only minor redactions. The assessments were requested by Richard N. Haass, then director of policy planning at the State Department, and were written by Paul R. Pillar, the national intelligence officer for the Near East, as a synthesis of views across the 16-agency intelligence community.

The report includes lists indicating that the analyses, which were reported by The Washington Post last week, were distributed at senior levels of the White House and the State and Defense departments and to the congressional armed services and appropriations committees. At the time, the White House and the Pentagon were saying that U.S. troops would be greeted as liberators, democracy would be quickly established and Iraq would become a model for the Middle East. Initial post-invasion plans called for U.S. troop withdrawals to begin in summer 2003.

The classified reports, however, predicted that establishing a stable democratic government would be a long challenge because Iraq's political culture did "not foster liberalism or democracy" and there was "no concept of loyal opposition and no history of alternation of power."

They also said that competing Sunni, Shiite and Kurd factions would "encourage terrorist groups to take advantage of a volatile security environment to launch attacks within Iraq." Because of the divided Iraqi society, there was "a significant chance that domestic groups would engage in violent conflict with each other unless an occupying force prevented them from doing so."

While predicting that terrorist threats heightened by the invasion would probably decline within five years, the assessments said that lines between al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups around the world "could become blurred." U.S. occupation of Iraq "probably would boost proponents of political Islam" throughout the Muslim world and "funds for terrorist groups probably would increase as a result of Muslim outrage over U.S. actions."

In the economic arena, the analysts predicted that oil revenue would greatly ease the rebuilding of Iraq's economy, provided that oil fields and infrastructure were not severely damaged. But, they said, "cuts in electricity or looting of distribution networks would have a cascading disastrous impact" and that large amounts of outside assistance would still be needed to provide services such as water and sanitation.

The assessments, like the Bush administration's public statements, inaccurately predicted that Iraq's oil production could be quickly increased, forecasting that production could rise to 3.1 million barrels a day "within several months of the end of hostilities." The analysts did not foresee that sabotage, theft and continued fighting would leave Iraq with oil production at less than 2.4 million

barrels per day.

The Senate panel said it focused on the two NIC assessments because they were the only prewar analyses representing the consensus views of the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and other agencies. The committee also published excerpts from other prewar reports and assessments from individual agencies.

Before War, CIA Warned of Negative Outcomes

Analysts in 2002 Described Worst-Case Scenarios, Including Anarchy in Iraq, Global Antipathy to U.S.

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On Aug. 13, 2002, the CIA completed a classified, six-page intelligence analysis that described the worst scenarios that could arise after a U.S.-led removal of Saddam Hussein: anarchy and territorial breakup in Iraq, a surge of global terrorism, and a deepening of Islamic antipathy toward the United States.

Titled "The Perfect Storm: Planning for Negative Consequences of Invading Iraq," the paper, written seven months before the war began, also speculated about al-Qaeda operatives taking "advantage of a destabilized Iraq to establish secure safe havens from which they can continue their operations," according to a report about prewar intelligence recently released by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The report said the CIA paper also cautioned about outcomes such as declining European confidence in U.S. leadership, Hussein's survival and retreat with regime loyalists, Iran working to install a friendly regime "tolerant of Iranian policies," Afghanistan tipping into civil strife because U.S. forces were not replaced by United Nations peacekeepers and troops from other countries, and violent demonstrations in Pakistan because of its support of Washington.

Before the war, while the Bush administration was putting a spotlight on the CIA's intelligence on Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, which turned out to be wrong, it either buried or ignored the agency's more accurate assessments of the problems that could emerge in the aftermath of regime change in Iraq, the Senate report said.

At the time the "Perfect Storm" report was finished, the administration was already heading toward

the decision to invade. A CIA assessment completed on Aug. 8, 2002, and also sent to the White House, found that while "on the surface, Iraq currently appears to lack both the socio-economic and politico-cultural prerequisites that political scientists generally regard as necessary to nurture democracy . . . we believe that Iraq has several advantages that, if buttressed by the West, could foster democracy in post-Saddam Iraq."

It warned, however, that chances of even partial success would require "long-term, active U.S./Western military, political and economic involvement."

On Aug. 14, 2002, a day after the "Perfect Storm" paper was sent to the White House, then-national security adviser Condoleezza Rice held a meeting of the national security team to draft a presidential directive titled "Iraq: Goals, Objectives and Strategy," according to the book "Plan of Attack" by The Washington Post's Bob Woodward. It talked of freeing Iraq and preventing it from "breaking out of containment and becoming a more dangerous threat to the region and beyond."

The directive also spoke of cutting "Iraq's links to and sponsorship of international terrorism," liberating the Iraqi people and assisting them "in creating a society based on moderation, pluralism and democracy."

The CIA "Perfect Storm" paper, carrying a series of warnings about how such goals might go seriously awry, had been requested in the summer of 2002, along with others on Iraq, by then-deputy national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley. But, according to then-CIA director George J. Tenet, it was relegated to the back of a thick briefing book handed out to President Bush's national security team for a meeting on Sept. 7, 2002, at Camp David, where the Iraq war was Topic A.

One paper in the front part of the briefing book "listed things that would be achieved by removing Saddam -- freeing the Iraqi people, eliminating WMD, ending threats to Iraq's neighbors, and the like," Tenet writes in his book, "At the Center of the Storm." Another paper in the middle of the briefing materials, Tenet writes, talked generally about how the United States would deal with post-Hussein Iraq, including a plan to retain but reform of much of the government bureaucracy.

In the "Perfect Storm" paper, CIA analysts offered what they described as "near-term tactical moves" that the administration could make to minimize the worst-case scenarios that the report presented. Among them were taking "concrete diplomatic steps toward Arab-Israeli peace" and providing "back-channel assurances to Tehran on the duration and extent of U.S. force deployments" -- actions that were not taken.

Tenet concedes that he did not press the "Perfect Storm" worst-case analyses at meetings. "There was, in fact, no screaming, no table-pounding," he writes. "We had no way of knowing then how the situation on the ground in Iraq would evolve."

Nor, he adds, was the CIA privy to subsequent administration actions in Iraq "that would help make many of these worst-case scenarios almost inevitable."

